

Message Text

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70

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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LIMDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL'S DEEPENING PALESTINIAN DILEMMA

REF: TEL AVIV 1995 (4/4/74 NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: ISRAEL'S PALESTINIAN DILEMMA IS EVEN MORE
INTRACTABLE AT PRESENT THAN IT SEEMED THROUGHOUT MOST OF 1974.
GOI POLICY ON THE DISPOSITION OF THE WEST BANK HAS REMAINED
ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED IN THE TRANSITION TO THE RABIN GOVT.
THAT POLICY IS EXPRESSED IN THREE PRINCIPLES: (1) TO NEGOTIATE
ONLY WITH THE GOVT OF JORDAN, NOT WITH TERRORIST ORGANIZA-
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TIONS: (2) TO REJECT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE STATE

BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE JORDAN RIVER: AND (3) TO CONSULT THE PUBLIC IN AN ELECTION BEFORE IMPLEMENTING AN AGREEMENT INVOLVING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS ON THE WEST BANK. FOR ISRAEL, THEREFORE, THE SOLE VALID NEGOTIATING PARTNER REMAINS KING HUSSEIN, AND IT REFUSES TO CONSIDER ANY DEALINGS WITH THE PLO. ISRAELIS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE ENHANCED INTERNATIONAL PRESTIGE OF THE PLO ARISING FROM THE RABIN CONFERENCE AND CONSIDERATION OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE AT THE UNGA, HAS REMOVED KING HUSSEIN FROM THE NEGOTIATING SCENE PERMANENTLY, AND THEY ARE PREPARED TO AWAIT HIS RETURN PATIENTLY. IN ANY CASE, THE CURRENT CONSTELLATION OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL FORCES WITHIN ISRAEL WORKS AGAINST NEW GOI INITIATIVES, NOR ARE THERE MANY SIGNS THAT, GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, ISRAEL WOULD NOW OFFER HUSSEIN "ENOUGH" IN ANY AGREEMENT FOR HIM TO BE ABLE TO ACCEPT. RABIN REALIZES THAT GIVEN THE INTENSITY OF POPULAR SENTIMENT, THE WEST BANK ISSUE COULD PROVOKE A POLITICAL STORM CAPABLE OF BRINGING DOWN HIS GOVT. IN SUM, THE GOI PREFERS THE STATUS QUO WITH ALL ITS DIFFICULTIES TO ANY ALTERNATIVE PRESENTLY AVAILABLE, AND WILL TAKE NO INITIATIVE TO ALTER IT UNLESS FORCED TO DO SO BY SOME NEW OUTSIDE FACTORS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE RABIN GOVT ASSUMED OFFICE IN EARLY JUNE 1974, ADOPTING AS ITS POLICY TOWARD THE WEST BANK THE SAME THREE PRINCIPLES WHICH HAD GUIDED THE MEIR GOVT BEFORE IT: (1) TO NEGOTIATE ONLY WITH THE GOVT OF JORDAN, NOT WITH TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS: (2) TO REJECT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE STATE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE JORDAN RIVER: AND (3) TO CONSULT THE PUBLIC IN AN ELECTION BEFORE IMPLEMENTING ANY AGREEMENT INVOLVING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS ON THE WEST BANK.

3. SINCE THEN A SERIES OF EVENTS BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE ISRAEL-- MOST NOTABLY AMONG THEM THE RABAT CONFERENCE, ARAFAT'S UN APPEARANCE, AND INCREASED TERRORIST ACTIVITY INSIDE ISRAELI BORDERS-- HAVE HAD THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF REMOVING HUSSEIN FROM THE NEGOTIATING SCENE-- AT LEAST TEMPORARILY-- WHILE REINFORCING THE GOI'S DETERMINATION TO REFUSE TO DEAL WITH THE PLO. THE RESULT VIRTUALLY ELIMINATES ANY POSSIBILITY THAT ISRAEL IN THE NEAR FUTURE WILL TAKE ANY NEW INITIATIVE ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE.

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4. THIS ISRAELI INERTIA, WE BELIEVE, IS EXPLAINED LARGELY BY THE RELATIONSHIP ISRAELIS DETECT BETWEEN THE QUESTIONS "WHO TO TALK TO" AND "WHAT TO TALK ABOUT". QUITE APART FROM POPULAR ISRAELI REVULSION AGAINST PLO DUE TO ITS REPUTATION AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, THE GOI IS AWARE THAT TO TALK TO THE PLO RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE ON THE WEST BANK. THIS REMAINS ANATHEMA TO ISRAELIS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS WHICH TO THEM ARE COMPELLING. FACT IS THAT

FROM GOI PERSPECTIVE THE PRESENT SITUATION ON THE WEST BANK WITH ALL ITS DIFFICULTIES IS PREFERABLE FOR NOW TO ANY ALTERNATIVE LIKELY TO EMERGE FROM SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS.

5. AT THE BEGINNING OF 1975, THEREFORE , ISRAEL SEES THE WEST BANK PALESTINIAN SITUATION AS FOLLOWS: (A) THE PLO REMAINS UNACCEPTABLE AS A NEGOTIATING PARTNER: (B) KING HUSSEIN'S DEPARTURE FROM THE WEST BANK NEGOTIATING SCENE MAY ONLY BE TEMPORARY-- IN FACT, AS MOST ISRAELIS SEE IT, THIS "TEMPORARY" SITUATION COULD CONTINUE ALMOST INDEFINITELY WITHOUT DAMAGE TO ISRAELI INTERESTS: AND (C) AN ALTERNATIVE TO HUSSEIN MIGHT BE FOUND IN THE EMERGENCE OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS OF AN INDIGENOUS WEST BANK LEADERSHIP WILLING TO ASSUME SOME DEGREE OF LOCAL AUTONOMY.

6. IN ANY CASE, RABIN IS CONSTRAINED FROM LAUNCHING ANY SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVE ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE BY HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. THOSE FAVORING THE STATUS QUO ON THE WEST BANK ARE SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO POST A POTENTIAL THREAT TO HIS CONTINUATION IN OFFICE. ON THIS ISSUE, DAYAN, SOME LIKUD FACTIONS, AND THE NRP COULD FIND A COMMON CAUSE. MOREOVER, THE WEST BANK MORE THAN ANY OTHER ISSUE IS LADEN WITH EMOTION FOR ISRAELIS WHO HAVE NEITHER RELIGIOUS NOR HISTORICAL ATTACHMENT TO THE WEST BANK, SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS REMAIN A MAJOR DETERRENT TO AGREEING TO A TOTAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK AS DEMANDED BY THE ARABS. AS A RESULT OF THESE FACTORS, THE RABIN GOVT IN ITS FIRST MONTHS HAS MADE VIRTUALLY NO EFFORT TO GENERATE MEANINGFUL PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ON THE WEST BANK, THOUGH FOR A BRIEF PERIOD FOLLOWING THE ALEXANDRIA COMMUNIQUE IN MID-JULY IT SEEMED AS IF IT MIGHT DO SO.

7. IN THE ABSENCE OF SOME NEW EXTERNAL ELEMENT, A SERIOUS
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POLITICAL INITIATIVE BY ISRAEL CAN BE CONSIDERED A POSSIBILITY ONLY IF ONE OF TWO CONDITIONS ARE MET. THE FIRST IS THAT THE PLO WILL BREAK THE CURRENT DEADLOCK OF NON-RECOGNITION. SUCH A STEP BY THE PLO, IN ORDER TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE GOI, WOULD HAVE TO BE UNMISTAKABLY CLEAR TO THE ISRAELI PUBLIC. AND THUS IS PROBABLY UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT. A SECOND POSSIBILITY IS THAT HUSSEIN AND THE PLO MIGHT WORK OUT BETWEEN THEMSELVES A NEGOTIATING ARRANGEMENT WHICH THE ISRAELIS WOULD BE HARD PUT TO REFUSE. EVEN THEN, HOWEVER, ISRAEL WOULD SEEK TO ASSURE ITSELF THAT FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES IT WOULD BE NEGOTIATING WITH HUSSEIN, NOT THE PLO. (I.E. -- HUSSEIN WOULD NOT BE ACTING AS A "REAL ESTATE" AGENT FOR THE PLO.)

8. EVEN IF ONE OF THESE CONDITIONS IS MET DURING THE COMING YEAR, THERE IS A SERIOUS QUESTION WHETHER RABIN WOULD BE WILLING

TO RISK A MAJOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONFRONTATION-- ENTAILING
A POSSIBLE THREAT TO THE SURVIVAL OF HIS GOVT-- WHICH WOULD
ENSUE SHOULD GOI TAKE A MEANINGFUL INITIATIVE TOWARD A WEST
BANK SETTLEMENT. WE CONCLUDE THAT, UNLESS PUSHED BY EXTERNAL
FACTORS, THE GOI WILL CONTINUE TO VIEW THE MAINTENANCE OF THE
STATUS QUO, WITH ALL ITS DIFFICULTIES, AS LESS PAINFUL
THAN ANY POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE.

9. FOREGOING IS SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS COVERED IN TEL AVIV
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